

Dear FCC:

I want to register my opposition to any relaxation of the rules concerning Broadcast Ownership.

Seeing how existing consolidations have eroded the variety and quality of programming (especially radio), I am convinced that further media consolidation will only be in the owners' interests, and definitely not the public's.

With further consolidation, I believe that local content and presence will continue to disappear, and I believe the growing influence of radio/venue alliances will unfairly stifle musicians who do not comply to the whims of these media corporations.

My most serious concern, however, involves basic Freedom of Speech. While I certainly recognize that the Bill of Rights offers protections only from the government, I am extremely concerned that a very few powerful corporations (and for that matter, individuals) will control content.

These large corporations will inevitably have ties to the government, so I am very concerned about the possibility of a quasi-governmental censorship role, that escapes the scrutiny of the Bill of Rights.

Case in point. A few years ago, Sheryl Crow put out an album referencing gun sales by Wal*Mart. That's fine- it's freedom of speech. Wal*Mart yanked the CD's off the shelves. That's freedom of speech as well. And finally, I was free to stop shopping at Wal*Mart. I suppose that's how the system is supposed to work. We are all free to make these choices.

Now, Fast Forward to 2003. The Dixie Chicks get pulled off of radio playlists after making some poorly thought out comments about the President. While I certainly don't agree with their perspective, they were indeed free to speak their minds. Now they have been yanked from the play lists, supposedly because of listener feedback. I am not so sure. Since most of these radio stations are owned by the same few corporations, there are no choices. In other words, because of the monopoly of the airwaves, I can't choose to tune in elsewhere to listen to the Dixie Chicks, even if I wanted to. I view this as editorial censorship, without a viable alternative, controlled by a dangerously small group of individuals.

I think there is already too much consolidation, but I know there is nothing I can do about that. Therefore, I can only strongly oppose any action that would further erode artists ability to create, and listeners/viewers/readers ability to choose.

Thank you for your consideration.

-Mark A. Weldon
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